

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY
THE COMMITTEE ON VETERAN'S AFFAIRS**

**STATEMENT OF
MS. ANITA K. BLAIR
DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS
OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
ON

MILITARY TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**

18 JULY 2002

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The important work and innovative approaches the members of Congress have devoted to assisting transitioning service members is extremely noteworthy and very much appreciated by every man and woman who has or will wear a military uniform in service to our Nation. We look forward to working with the committee and the Congress in improving upon the existing transition services and benefits.

Navy Transition Assistance Program

The Navy's Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is an extremely valuable benefit for our sailors. Not only does it assist them in making critical decisions and, when applicable, an effective transition to civilian life, it is also a recruiting and retention tool. The TAP program provides a variety of transition services for military members and their spouses, including, computerized job banks, resume writing assistance, and help with the employment interviewing process. All transition services are made available to military spouses and family members, without restriction. By virtue of their voluntary military service, our people have earned our long-term support. We have an inherent responsibility to provide them with the information, assistance, and skills needed to make informed decisions about their futures.

The core of the program is the TAP Seminar, a three to five day workshop that provides material on Reserve affiliation, extended medical and dental coverage, educational compensation, vocational benefits, and relevant job search materials. TAP also provides attendees with detailed information about available benefits in terms of educational opportunities, both while continuing their Navy career and upon leaving the Service.

In addition to the seminar, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides individualized counseling to all participants in the Transition Assistance Program. The VA Military Services Coordinator conducts briefings at our transition sites located across

the country and around the world. These briefings provide information on the full range of VA benefits, to include but not limited to, disability compensation, education, the home loan program, insurance, vocational rehabilitation, and burial benefits. Disabled transition (DTAP) is an integral part of the transition program focusing on those service members being separated due to a disability incurred while on active duty. Benefits information is not only provided at separation and pre-retirement briefings but at other information dissemination events such as General Military Training.

Because DoL does not have representatives overseas, the Navy has trained Transition program managers as DoL TAP facilitators via the National Veterans Training Institute. All transition staff members overseas facilitate the identical TAP workshop provided by DoL/VA at stateside locations. The DoL employment function does not shift to the Navy, but rather only the preparatory educational phase of the process. In delivering the TAP workshops overseas, the Navy utilizes the same DoL TAP workbooks as used in the United States. Navy has historically procured these student workbooks directly from DoL at an approximate cost of \$20,000 annually.

Since its inception in 1992, under Public Law 101-510, TAP has been subject to continual congressional review. Contrary to the intent of the legislation, TAP has been frequently perceived as a program specifically intended to provide service members and their families with separation assistance resulting from the draw down. As you know, the program was initiated prior to the draw down, and the law established three permanent transition services: pre-separation counseling, employment assistance, and relocation assistance for members stationed overseas. Although the draw down was essentially complete at the end of FY99, for reasons wholly unrelated to the draw down, we anticipate separating approximately 40,000 to 50,000 sailors, annually. Causes for these separations are varied but integral to the structure of the Navy: retirements, resignations and other transitions to the civilian sector. Consequently, we still have a

significant need for the services offered through TAP. We must continue to provide and to improve upon these services for our people.

To meet the challenges of the 21st Century, we need to adjust the structure of the program to better address the needs of today's sailors. Our challenge is to revitalize the TAP program through innovative solutions, taking into consideration the complexity of our world and ever-tightening fiscal resources.

Along with the challenge of program restructuring, Navy's TAP has had to meet the challenge of increasing demand for its services with a diminishing number of staff. The TAP budget has been reduced 20 percent since its inception, resulting in elimination of 22 percent of our field staff. In spite of these funding and staffing reductions, we have continued to provide a quality program that fulfills the requirements of the Public Law. As evidenced by the overwhelming popularity of TAP, sailors view the services provided as an integral part of their quality of life benefits. Accordingly, we are shifting our emphasis solely from sailors leaving the Navy to all sailors, educating and assisting them at various stages of their careers. Recognizing that all members of the Navy will ultimately return to civilian life, we are creating exciting new avenues to integrate the transition process into a sailor's complete military life cycle. The Navy's transition program is designed to be a career-long process.

In order to provide these comprehensive services, we must identify those quantitative factors that are indicative of a successful transition. This endeavor has proved difficult, as the legislative authority for the Transition Assistance Program contained no anticipated benchmark or desired measures of effectiveness.

While we have come to realize that there may be no single definition or measure of a successful transition we have settled on some indicators and guidelines for successful participation. The best definition of success may be the individual program participant's ability to meet his or her own needs, expectations, and post-military career

goals. Simple statistics on post-military employment may provide a limited picture of a well-defined and successful transition program. Other prime indicators of a successful transition program could be: retention rates following attendance at TAP workshops, unemployment compensation trends for recently separated veterans, and participant satisfaction with a program that helps them achieve an individual goal. Simply focusing effectiveness measures toward post-military employment may provide an inaccurate picture of a well-defined and successful transition program. A successful transition program focuses on the career life cycle, not just targeting job placement opportunities.

In January 2000, the Navy began a project to examine the correlation between TAP workshop attendance and retention. Initially believing all TAP workshop participants would separate, we examined workshop participant rosters from various field sites to validate this belief. The review provided eye-opening results. In FY-99, a review of only 15 transition sites indicated 6,486 personnel identified as “retention eligible” attended our workshops more than 90 days prior to separation. Of that number, 20 percent, or 1,282 continued their Navy careers beyond the expiration of their military contract following TAP workshop attendance. Conversely, 3,296 “retention eligible” personnel attended less than 90 days prior to separation. Only 4 percent or 138 remained on active duty. Retention eligible was defined as those personnel who were not attending the TAP workshop as a result of retirement or unanticipated loss due to medical or administrative separation. An expanded examination of FY-00 TAP workshop participants, encompassing 41 transition sites validated the early indications of the FY-99 review.

The latest examination of FY-01 participants supports the conclusion that early participation in TAP workshops increases the probability of retention. Of the 25 transition sites reviewed, 2,360 attended more than 90 days prior to separation. Today, 37 percent or 878, continue to serve beyond their expiration of enlistment date. A total

of 607 attended the workshops less than 90 days prior to separation, resulting in the only 87 individuals opting for continuation on active duty.

Sailors need to explore “all” employment options before making a decision to reenlist. TAP workshop participants are seeing that their best employment option may be with their current employer.

To ensure that all of these “transitions” are smooth, we are developing the Career Options and Navy Skills Evaluation Program (CONSEP). CONSEP will involve three phases of training throughout a Sailor’s military life cycle:

- New Accession Course of Instruction (entry into military);
- Mid-Career Course of Instruction (6-12 years); and
- Senior Course of Instruction (17-18 years).

This newest initiative is the first holistic approach to transition education undertaken within the Department of Defense. We completed and delivered the Mid-Career Course of Instruction to 75 percent of our transition sites in FY-01. We will complete delivery to the remaining locations by the end of FY-02. Already, the results are encouraging. Over 250 mid-career petty officers have participated in the workshop since delivery to the Fleet. DoD is exploring adaptability options for further deployment throughout the entire Department of Defense. Work is already underway with the Marine Corps to develop a similar program. Representatives from the Air Force will preview the Navy curriculum later this year.

We have also begun developing the CONSEP New Accession Course of Instruction. The mission of CONSEP is to increase retention and mission readiness by providing professional career development resources to the military community through the career life cycle. Each phase focuses on excellence, personal and professional development, with a strong emphasis on career planning and personal financial management. We will continue to pursue programs that will enhance Navy’s recruiting

and retention efforts as well as our sailors' quality of life and professional development. CONSEP will accomplish these goals. The focus on total life cycle management will better prepare sailors for total military career management -- thereby increasing retention. And, in addition to allowing sailors to more effectively navigate their military careers, the information and education provided through CONSEP will help sailors become better ambassadors for the Navy when they eventually leave the service, thus contributing to our recruiting efforts. We look forward to reporting the results of our efforts in more detail following the end of the mid-career pilot curriculum, scheduled for 30 September 2003.

Navy has embarked on a complete review of marketing techniques for many of our quality of life programs. Through the full utilization of technology, many of our programs and services are available on-line through websites, such as: DoD Operation Transition, DoD Transportal, LIFELines, StayNavy, and the Navy Personnel Command homepage. We also publicize individual transition success stories and distribute specific program brochures through a variety of marketing avenues. Our best tool continues to be the satisfied TAP customer. Information about our transition program is provided during each session of Prospective Commanding Officer/Executive Officer indoctrination courses and through the Senior Enlisted Academy.

Command leaders aggressively support the overall mission of the Transition Assistance Program. Every effort is made to ensure all anticipated separations scheduled to occur through an extended deployment have full access to programs and assistance prior to the scheduled deployment. It is Navy policy that every transitioning service member attend a TAP workshop no later than 90 days prior to separation, unless specifically declined in writing. To provide for maximum flexibility at the unit or command level, unanticipated losses are authorized full utilization of transition services for a period of 180 days following separation. During deployments, Commands continually contact

TAP centers located overseas to utilize services during limited import periods. Navy no longer flies mobile TAP teams out to returning units. Funding constraints, limited classroom space aboard ship, frequent interruptions due to shipboard routines and lack of Internet connectivity contributed to the decision to discontinue services aboard ship. Full access to all transition services, regardless of pay grade or rank, remains a top priority for Navy leadership. We are committed to offering quality transition services to all the men and women who have served our Nation.

Statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor/Veterans Employment Training Service indicate TAP workshop participants find employment as much as 3 weeks sooner than non-workshop participants. Figures also indicate a significant decline in Unemployment Compensation Cost reimbursements paid by Navy since the implementation of TAP in the early 90's. The Navy's separation rates have decreased over the last few years, but more importantly; our unemployment compensation reimbursements have continued to drop at a more significant rate. For example, separations in 2001 were 45% of what they were in 1993, while the Navy's unemployment compensation costs were only 27% of what they were in 1993.

United States Marine Corps

The Marine Corps has three crucial missions: making Marines, winning the nation's battles, and returning improved citizens to civilian society. The 32nd Commandant, General Jim Jones, clearly stated: "We make a significant investment in our Marines, we need to keep the best of them For those who choose to leave active duty, we can provide assistance in the transition to civilian life ... to be more responsible citizens with an unlimited future and by emphasizing the value of an Honorable Discharge."

Because of the unique mission and expeditionary nature, the Marine Corps is largely a young, first term force. The Marine Corps has the youngest age of all the Services, approximately 16 percent are teenagers. The Marine Corps is the only Service with more active duty personnel than family members. Only 43.4 percent of Marines, approximately 40 percent of enlisted and 70 percent of officers, are married, the lowest of the U.S. Armed Forces. Each year the Marine Corps recruits a large number of young men and women who aspire to be Marines and at the same time returns to American society a significant number who have fulfilled their term as Marines. In 2001, the Marine Corps recruited 30,522 civilians and separated 31, 258 enlisted Marines of whom 82 percent were completing their first term. In 2000, the Marine Corps recruited 31,360 civilians and separated 30,590 enlisted Marines of whom 81 percent were completing their first term. The Corps, therefore, is closely and constantly attuned to the relationship between the Marine and the larger American society they defend.

Equally important is the connection between Marines on active duty and those who have left active duty. "Marines take care of their own" is an ethos we are proud to honor. An outcome of this ethos is the Marine Corps Transition Assistance Management Program (TAMP). It is an essential component in the way we care for our Marines. The transition program enables separating Marines and their families to make a smoother transition to civilian life. The Marine Corps TAMP is fully implemented at 18 Career Resource Management Centers (CRMCs) with a dedicated, professional staff. Marine Corps CRMCs provide: congressionally mandated pre-separation counseling as well as a three to four day Department of Labor Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Workshop. Not mandated by law are workshops including job search and employment assistance; resume writing workshops; career counseling; web-based job search techniques; networking skills and strategies; Veteran's Benefits Eligibility information, resource libraries, federal employment information, local job development, job fairs, pre-

retirement seminars, and employer recruitment. Entitlement for services lasts 90 days post service. Most transition assistance managers continue to assist retirees as their schedules allow.

Some barriers to timely TAP attendance are: Lack of command support (primarily due to Operational Tempo), deployments, a pending reenlistment package, an administrative hold, involuntary separation, or a pending medical board.

TAP Workshops are facilitated through the partnership of DoD, DoL, and the VA. The DoL facilitates TAP within the United States. The Veteran's Affairs briefing is an integral part of the TAP Workshops. Marine Corps TAMP Staff, however, facilitates overseas TAP Workshops. In 2000, twenty TAMP personnel attended the Train the Trainer course offered by the National Veteran's Training Institute. Additional training will be provided as needed. The Marine Corps TAMP managers, overseas, procure the TAP workbooks for the classes from DoL.

Because deployment is a way of life for Marines, designated TAMP personnel accompany Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU) afloat to provide transition services. To make certain there are no difficulties with Marines separating immediately upon return from deployment without benefit of TAP, Camp Pendleton and Camp Lejeune provide TAMP services to all returning Marine Expeditionary Units. TAMP personnel fly out to meet the ship at a port visit, and travel with the ship during the remainder of the float.

The Marine Corps published a new Marine Corps Order (MCO) 1700.24B in early 2002, mandating attendance at the DoL TAP Workshops. While insufficient time has passed to accurately gauge the effectiveness of the order, we are confident that mandatory TAP workshop attendance will help Marines. We can report that anecdotal evidence from installations points to improved TAP workshop attendance. We believe strongly that the program is valuable, because it empowers Marines and their families to take a proactive approach to their future, in both career and educational development.

TAP has been successful in helping Marines transition into civilian life. Since October 1990, over 350,000 separating and retiring Marines have benefited from this program. While the evidence is largely anecdotal, we hear good reports from all across the Marine Corps. Consistently, transitioning Marines, both separatees and pre-retirees, communicate with the installation TAMP staff about the success they achieved because of TAMP services. Employers contact Headquarters and TAMP personnel with success stories about their employees who are Marines. They speak of how well prepared Marines are for their transition and how well they integrate themselves within a company. Another measure of success is the decline we have seen in unemployment compensation paid by the Marine Corps since the early 1990s and recent stability in these costs.

In final assessment, however, it is the commander's commitment to the program that is the key to success. Commanders who have had personal exposure to TAMP services and the TAP workshops are consistently the strongest supporters of TAMP.

The 32nd Commandant has stressed in his guidance that every separating Marine is and remains a "Marine For Life." Indeed, transitioning Marines re-entering civilian life, whether after four or 30 years, remain an important part of the Marine Corps family. They represent a considerable investment on the part of the Marine Corps and continue to be a valuable national resource. Many of these Marines, however, have lost formal contact and personal bonds with the Marine Corps. Because Marines represent a special connection to American society, the Marine Corps has developed the "Marine for Life" (M4L) program. The Marine for Life program promotes the beneficial connection between the Corps and the larger American society and acts as a force multiplier to our TAMP. M4L improves assistance to Marines leaving active service, sponsors them on their return to civilian life, keeps them within the Marine Corps family, and re-emphasizes the value of their honorable discharge. While the program includes initiatives involving

commanders and the Marine Corps culture, the groundbreaking element is the creation of an assistance network of Marine Corps “alumni” to provide enhanced transition assistance and support to transitioning Marines. The end state of the M4L program is a nationwide Marine and Marine-friendly network available to all Marines leaving active service. This network will improve their transition to civilian life and make sure that no Marine who honorably wore the eagle, globe, and anchor is lost to the Marine Corps family.

M4L is redefining the perception of “separation” within the Corps. End of Active Service (EAS) no longer means the end of the Marine Corps in a transitioner’s life. M4L is building and nurturing a nationwide web-based network that will capture the names and information of transitioning Marines, Reserve Marines, retirees and other Veteran Marines, Marine Corps affiliated organizations, associations, and volunteer groups, and Marine-friendly employers and other useful connections in hometown communities across America. M4L formalizes many functions already performed by Marines. Marines are already connecting with other veterans and Marine-friendly resources across America. Robust community outreach programs allow recruiters to develop relationships with business and community leaders and Marine affiliated organizations. Through TAMP, the Marine Corps interacts with potential employers and provides Marines with valuable transition assistance tools. In coordination with the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), the Marine Corps develops relationships with businesses, benefiting all Marines. By assembling the existing human networks and making them available via a web-database, M4L is simply offering a formal mechanism for sponsorship assistance to all Marines. No longer will the benefits of the Marine Corps family be available to only the lucky few by virtue of rank or their own personal network.

As noted earlier, unemployment compensation paid by the Marine Corps is an informal indicator of the effectiveness of transition support programs. Given the fact that non-retirement eligible separating Marines tend to be young, and unemployment compensation costs for 20-24 year old males tends to be high, especially for minority males, the Marine for Life program has the potential to be an extremely successful safety net for these individuals, providing the network to help them not only transition into civilian life, but to succeed.

The Marine Corps Transition program is marketed Corps-wide through direct and distribution list email; through installation newspapers, radio and television; through flyers and pamphlets, and web sites; and through briefs and community outreach programs.

The Marine Corps encourages spouses to attend the TAP Workshops, but most Marine spouses work during normal business hours. Almost every installation has tried offering classes at flexible times, but in every case, the installations reported very low attendance and those sessions were curtailed. Additionally, the normal TAP workshop has between 10 and 12 facilitators covering all pertinent topics, including DoL and Veterans Affairs topics. It is extremely difficult to offer full services outside the typical workday and have the necessary subject matter experts available.

There appears to be a perception regarding TAP that separating officers have greater access to programs than separating enlisted. This is not the case in the Marine Corps, where the enlisted to officer ratio is 8:1. Over the past two years, officers have accounted for four percent of total TAP attendance on average across the Corps. We have found that many officers believe they do not need TAP services and therefore waive their right to attend TAP Workshops. Mandatory attendance at the TAP workshops, under the MCO, will increase officer participation.

Transition services are extremely important to our men and women who have worn the uniform. These programs are worthy of the support of Congress and the American people.

Per the Committee's request, the Department of the Navy could use your assistance in the following areas to enhance an already highly successful program and to ensure the future integrity of our Transition Assistance Program.

- To ensure the stability and effectiveness of the program, we would welcome assurances that Congress intends to provide continued long-term support for TAP.
- To ensure future development and innovative approaches to program delivery, we ask for a review of funding levels. Our transition delivery sites are hard pressed to meet the minimum requirements of the legislation under current funding levels mirroring FY-92 levels.
- To review and update the list of Separation Program Designator (SPD) Codes to ensure that transition benefits are more equitably distributed. Many of those involuntarily separated are separated for cause – failure to comply with established directives -- and should not receive the same post-service transition benefits as those who follow the rules.
- To request the Department of Labor (DoL) redesign and develop a TAP curriculum tailored specifically to separatees and retirees. The current "one" size fits all" design may not be serving the needs of our 21st century customer base.
- To encourage DoL to further expand its role in meeting the legislative requirements of Title 10 of the United States Code by providing employment assistance to transitioning military personnel overseas.

- To establish an awareness campaign, under the oversight of DoL or VA to more effectively raise the knowledge level of employers on the skills, abilities, and attributes today's veteran offers America.
- To establish a national awards recognition program for employers who hire our veterans. A similar program is already fully functional through The American Legion that may be expanded to show our level of commitment as a nation to our veterans.

The Department of the Navy is extremely proud of the transition programs we have today and the programs we are developing for the future. Our ultimate goal is to continue to provide a quality program, tailored to meet the unique needs of our sailors and marines, both ashore and afloat, and to improve upon all our transition services. Transition Assistance, in fact, may be the most important veteran's benefit we provide- both for the individual and society. We owe this to our veterans. Failure to provide this essential assistance may ultimately impact our ability to recruit today's youth into the All-Volunteer Force. Our first President of the United States, George Washington, recognized this tremendous responsibility over 220 years ago when he said, "*The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional as to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.*"

In conclusion, our Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Honorable Anthony Principi, while serving as the Chairman of the *Commission on Service members and Veterans Transition Assistance*, in June 1997, eloquently and accurately stated that, "Transitioning service members and veterans represent a national resource and unique talent pool" and that helping these members "...transition successfully into the civilian economy is a win-win situation for America."

